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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
4 November 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: World Reaction to the Coup in South
Vietnam

COMMUNIST BLOC

1. Although there has been no direct official commentary on Diem's overthrow, bloc propaganda treatment of the coup has followed predictable lines.

2. Bloc commentators claim that the US was responsible for the coup and imply that the action was necessitated by the need to tighten control over the South Vietnam military machine and to step up the war effort, which has been meeting serious defeats.

3. Both Pravda and Izvestiya have attacked the new Saigon regime for advocating a continuation of the war. Pravda compared Diem to Syngman Rhee, Nuri As-Said, Menderes, and other "imperialist henchmen," pointing out that his fate was sealed long ago. TASS claimed that all that really happened was that "new men" were called in to try to suppress the national liberation movement. Izvestiya noted that while there have been official US denials of involvement in the coup, "nobody believes them." And a commentary on the Soviet Home Service maintained that while Press Secretary Salinger will not comment on the timing of US recognition of the new regime, "many agencies stress that it will happen very soon."

4. On 2 November, Moscow's commentator on Southeast Asian affairs claimed that there were grounds to believe that the CIA had a hand in the coup, declaring that "the handwriting is too familiar." He alleged that "several days before the putsch, units of the US Seventh Fleet" were sent to South Vietnam and that "on the evening" of the coup, Admiral Harry Felt arrived in Saigon.

State Department review completed

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5. The Peiping press gives prominent attention to the appeal of the South Vietnamese Liberation Front to all Vietnamese to oppose the military clique. Peiping NCNA quoted Japanese newspapers to the effect that the coup was carried out deliberately with American support and that President Kennedy had ordered US troops to South Vietnam in support of the "pro-American" military coup leaders. The news service also quoted Western news agencies to the effect that the new military regime "does not intend to expand democracy at a time when the state is concentrating all its efforts on the vital war against communism."

6. Hanoi Radio commented that the US-sponsored coup in South Vietnam reflected the "bitter failure" of US policy. The coup leaders, the commentary alleged, may have opposed Diem, but they also oppose communism--the people.

7. Radio Havana described the coup in a 2 November broadcast as brief, bloody, and US-backed, and noted that the Ngo brothers died under mysterious circumstances. The broadcast also observed that, as in all US-promoted coups, whether in the Dominican Republic or in Honduras, the new junta in South Vietnam quickly proclaimed it had moved to save the country from communism.

EUROPE AND CANADA

8. An official of the British Foreign Office commented to a US Embassy officer on 2 November that bloodshed and the "suicide" of the Ngo brothers was highly regrettable, but the quick and decisive action of the insurgents had brought about an outcome which was "all to the good." The official described the civilians chosen to head the new government in Saigon as a "good lot" who should be more amenable and reasonable than their predecessors. He was confident there would be no difficulty about British recognition of the new government.

9. France apparently intends to "wait for the dust to settle" before issuing a declaration, according to a high official in the Quai. The official, while observing that the Vietnamese coup leaders by and large seemed favorably disposed toward the West, had some preliminary reservations, and wanted more information.

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10. In response to a US request that other Free World countries take the lead in recognizing the new regime, a Canadian Embassy officer informed the Department on 2 November that Canada could not be expected to be among the first to recognize in view of its special situation as an ICC member. The officer indicated, however, that there was no alternative to recognition, that the problem was one of timing, and that Ottawa would take up the matter early this week.

11. Apparently mindful of the religious issues involved, Pope Paul addressed a message to the people of South Vietnam on 2 November. The message made no reference to the coup, however, and merely expressed sympathy for the Vietnamese people.

12. The Indian press has given wide coverage to developments in Saigon, headlining the "success" of the coup. The only editorial to date says that the Diem regime had become so repressive that sooner or later something had to give. Most reporting, however, takes the line that the US instigated the coup. The Statesman correspondent in Singapore, for example, wrote that "although US officials have denied any American complicity in the coup, Washington will have a hard time convincing the world of its altruistic motives."

13. The official Pakistan radio has been generally favorable to the coup, and yesterday quoted Foreign Minister Bhutto as saying that "the main cause of the revolution appears to be the indefensible attitude of the Diem government toward its own citizens."

SOUTHEAST ASIA

14. The Philippine press has welcomed the coup, expressing wishes for the success of the new government. The Malaysian deputy prime minister said that he was "very sorry" to hear that Diem and Nhu were dead, and stated that "we will have to wait and see" about recognizing the new government.

15. A leading Malaysian newspaper expressed satisfaction over the coup.

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16. In Cambodia, Prince Sihanouk has indicated that he hopes to trade recognition for agreement to certain concessions he was unable to extract from the Diem government. Cambodia broke relations with Saigon last August.

17. Laotian right-wing leader Phoumi Nosavan registered satisfaction over events in Saigon, noting that prospects were now improved for successful action against the Viet Cong. King Savang, however, has expressed doubt that the coup would substantially change the situation.

FAR EAST

18. Reuters from Singapore quotes unnamed Chinese Nationalist officials as having expressed "profound regret" over Diem's reported death. The Nationalist government, the dispatch said, is withholding official comment pending confirmation of Diem's death.

19. Almost all Hong Kong papers editorialized yesterday on the coup, Communist and leftist papers generally comparing it to the deposition of Syngman Rhee by the military. Some, however, cautiously expressed the wish that the coup would bring new hope for the South Vietnamese people.

20. In Seoul, although the fall of the Diem regime was generally welcomed, there were occasional digs at the US, one paper saying that "the alliance policy of the US Government ought to undergo a thorough re-evaluation in the light of the frequent military takeovers in its allied countries."

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